113, 642 Belorussia RC1

[For comparisons of the Constitution of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic of December 23, 1936, as amended through July 11, 1947, with other constitutions of the Sixteen Constituent Republics of the USSR, see 70: American Russian Institute, R1 Soviet Union, category 116.]

7; Krushinsky - 1 - G-4, 5 (no date) 1953 RC1 Belorussia RC1

Belorussian Communism and Nationalism -- Personal Recollections

S. Krushinskii

Introduction: 1917-1920

668 The February Revolution of 1917 must be considered the turning point in the history of the Belorussian national movement. From the first days of the revolution there took place throughout all of Belorussia, especially in the future capital, Minsk, various congresses, conferences, and meetings in which, besides discussion of special questions, the problem of the future destiny of the area and its state structure occupied a position of by no means minor importance. All along the enormous front, in Petrograd, the Baltic Fleet, the Black Sea Fleet, in Odessa, and in other places, Belorussian officers and soldiers organized their own national committees and unions in, as it were, an answering echo to the activities in the homeland. Belorussians on the front were very interested in the political doings at home. Subsequently most of those who had organized committees at the front occupied prominent positions in national work at home.

Post-revolutionary events and the national questions raised by the masses required solutions and the acceptance of some kind of decisions. Searching for a solution, the political leaders of the time came to the conclusion that only a congress of delegates elected by the whole nation would be authorized properly to determine the form of the state structure of Belorussia, and likewise to resolve the most pressing post-revolutionary questions.

668 ●642 The First All-Belorussian Congress convened in Minsk from the eighteenth to the thirty-first of December, 1917. Of the delegates present 1,167 had a deciding voice and 705 a consultative voice. However the Congress did not finish its work and on December 30th was dispersed by armed units of Bolsheviks. The Congress passed on its powers for the conduct of further work to the Rada of the Belorussian National Republic, then and there elected at the Congress. The Rada chiefly utilized the underground to carry on its work under the difficult conditions of war and the Bolshevik terror. In its session of March 25, 1918, the Rada passed a resolution of historic importance for the Belorussian nation, known as the Manifesto of March 25. In the Manifesto it was stated that "Belorussia declares itself to be an independent National Republic."

I INTRODUCTION

131 The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic is situated on the western border of the U.S.S.R. between the upper and middle reaches of the Rivers Dnieper, Bug, and Western Dvina. The area of the Republic is about 89,000 square miles; and in October 1939 its population was estimated at 10,386,000 inhabitants; the capital city is Minsk. Approximately a quarter of the territory consists of valuable coniferous (pine and fir) and deciduous (oak and aspen) forests. The climate is mild and humid; and beneath the soil lie large deposits of peat, phosphorites, fire-proof, acid-proof and porcelain clay, marl, sand for glass making, and bituminous shale.

642 The B.S.S.R. was proclaimed on January 1, 1919. In 1922, together with the other Soviet Republics, it formed one of the constituent Republics of the U.S.S.R.

At the Republican level, its government consists of a Council of Ministers and the Byelorussian Supreme Soviet (the legislative assembly of the Republic). At the Federal level, it has representatives in the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., which is divided into two chambers having equal legislative power; the Soviet of Union elected on the basis of one member for every 300,000 of population; and the Soviet of Nationalities, elected on the basis of 25 deputies from each Union Republic, 11 from each Autonomous Republic, five from each Autonomous Region, and one deputy from each national area. Also at the Federal level are the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. - the highest organ of executive and administrative power - and the Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R.

648 Each Republic has the right to enter into relations with foreign states and to conclude treaties with them; but foreign affairs concerning the interests of the Union as a whole are dealt with by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the U.S.S.R. Certain of the ministries - for example, the Ministry of Foreign Trade - are the exclusive prerogative of the Union Government. Others exist both at the Union level and in the individual republics; and a number exist only in the republics.

631 For administrative purposes the Byelorussian Republic is divided into thirteen "oblasts", or provinces, which in turn are subdivided into "raions", or counties. Oblasts and raions are not necessarily uniform in size and population, but vary according to the concentration of industry, or for administrative convenience.

871 Between its inception in 1919 and the outbreak of war in 1941, the B.S.S.R. had made substantial progress in all directions. Universal education had been introduced, and over a million children attended school. Before the war the Republic had 23 higher educational institutions, a large number of technical schools, and 30 scientific research institutes headed by the Academy of Science.

9: American Russian Institute RC1 Belorussia RC1

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[For the complete text of the Constitution of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic of December 23, 1936, as amended through July 11, 1947, see cat. 116, entire source.]

9: Amer. Russ. Inst. (no date) 1950 RC1 Belorussia RC1
[Constitution as of July 1, 1947]

CONSTITUTION (FUNDAMENTAL LAW) OF THE BELORUSSIAN SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC

Chapter I. The Social Structure

642 Art. 1. The Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic is a socialist state of workers and peasants.

Art. 2. The Soviets of Working People's deputies, which grew and attained strength as a result of the overthrow of the landlords and capitalists, the achievement of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the liberation of the Belorussian people from national oppression by tsarism and by the Russian imperialist bourgeoisie and the destruction of the Belorussian nationalist counter-revolution, constitute the political foundation of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Art. 3. In the Belorussian SSR all power belongs to the working people of town and country as represented by the Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

471 Art. 4. The socialist system of economy and the socialist ownership of the means and instruments of production firmly established as a result of the abolition of the capitalist system of economy, the abrogation of private ownership of the means and instruments of production and the elimination of the exploitation of man by man, constitute the economic foundation of the Belorussian SSR.

421 Art. 5. Socialist property in the Belorussian SSR exists either in the form of State property (the possession of the whole people) or in the form of co-operative and collective farm property (property of a collective farm or property of a co-operative association).

475 Art. 6. The land, its natural deposits, waters, forests, mills, factories,
421 mines, rail, water and air transport, banks, communications, large State-organised agricultural enterprises (State farms, machine and tractor stations and the like), as well as municipal enterprises and the bulk of dwelling houses in the cities and industrial localities, are State property, that is, belong to the whole people.

421 Art. 7. The common enterprise of collective farms and co-operative organisa-
474 tions, with their live stock and implements, and the products of the collective farms and co-operative organizations, as well as their common buildings, constitute the common socialist property of the collective farms and co-operative organizations.

[472] In addition to its basic income from the public collective farm enterprise, every household in a collective farm has for its private use a small plot of land attached to the dwelling and, as its private property, a subsidiary establishment on the plot, a dwelling house, live stock, poultry and minor agricultural implements — in accordance with the Rules of the Agricultural Artel.

423 Art. 8. The land occupied by collective farms is secured to them for their
474 use free of charge and for an unlimited time, that is, in perpetuity.

472 Art. 9. Alongside the socialist system of economy, which is the predominant form of economy in the Belorussian SSR, the law permits the small private economy of individual peasants and handicraftsmen, based on their personal labour and precluding the exploitation of the labour of others.

421 Art. 10. The right of citizens to personal ownership of their incomes from work and of their savings, of their dwelling houses and subsidiary household

9: Amer. Russ. Inst. (no date) 1950 RC1 Belorussia RC1

[Constitution as of July, 1947]

421 economy, their household furniture and utensils and articles of personal use and convenience, as well as the right of inheritance of personal property of citizens, is protected by law.

185 471 Art. 11. The economic life of the Belorussian SSR is determined and directed by the State national economic plan with the aim of increasing the public wealth, of steadily improving the material conditions of the working people and raising their cultural level, of strengthening the Belorussian SSR, and of consolidating the independence of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and strengthening its defensive capacity.

461 Art. 12. In the Belorussian SSR work is a duty and matter of honour for every able-bodied citizen, in accordance with the principle: "He who does not work, neither shall he eat."

The principle applied in the Belorussian SSR is that of socialism: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his work."

Chapter II. The State Structure

631 Art. 13. For the purpose of mutual assistance among the Union Republics along economic and political lines, as well as along the line of defence, the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic voluntarily united with the other equal Soviet Socialist Republics, namely:

The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic,
The Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic,
The Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic and
The Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic

in a federal state, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Proceeding from the aforesaid, the Belorussian SSR ensures to the USSR, as represented by its higher organs of state power and organs of state administration, the rights defined in Article 14 of the Constitution of the USSR.

Outside of the spheres set forth in Article 14 of the Constitution of the USSR, the Belorussian SSR exercises state authority independently, retaining its sovereign rights in full.

Art. 14. The Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic consists of the Baranovichi, Bobruisk, Brest, Vitebsk, Gomel, Grodno, Minsk, Mogilev, Molodechno, Pinsk, Polessye and Polotsk Regions.

642 Art. 15. The Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic reserves the right freely to secede from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Art. 16. The territory of the Belorussian SSR may not be altered without its consent.

9: Amer. Russ. Inst. (no date) 1950 RC1 Belorussia RC1
[Constitution as of July, 1947]

642 [701] Art. 16a. The Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic has its own Republican military formations.

Art. 16b. The Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic has the right to enter [648] into direct relations with foreign states and to conclude agreements and exchange diplomatic and consular representatives with them.

Art. 17. The laws of the USSR are binding within the territory of the Belorussian SSR.

[647] Art. 18. Every citizen of the Belorussian SSR is a citizen of the USSR.

Citizens of all other Union Republics enjoy on the territory of the Belorussian SSR equal rights with citizens of the Belorussian SSR.

Art. 19. The jurisdiction of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, as represented by its higher organs of state power and organs of state administration, embraces:

a) Adoption of the Constitution of the Belorussian SSR and control over its observance;

b) Establishment of the boundaries, and of the division into districts, of regions; submission of the formation of new regions constituting part of the Belorussian SSR to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for confirmation;

c) Legislation of the Belorussian SSR;

d) Maintenance of public order and safeguarding the rights of citizens;

e) Approval of the national-economic plan of the Belorussian SSR;

f) Approval of the state budget of the Belorussian SSR and of the report on its fulfilment;

g) Determination of state and local taxes, imposts and non-tax revenues in conformity with the laws of the USSR; direction of the fulfilment of the local budgets of the regions;

h) Direction of insurance and savings;

i) Administration of the banks, industrial, agricultural and trading enterprises and organisations subordinate to the Republic, as well as direction of local industry;

j) Control and superintendence of the condition and administration of enterprises subordinate to the Union;

k) Establishment of the procedure governing the use of land, mineral wealth, forests and waters;

l) Direction of dwelling houses and the municipal economy, dwelling house construction and the modernisation of cities and other inhabited places;

m) Road building; direction of local transport and communications;

n) Labour legislation;

o) Direction of social maintenance;

p) Direction of elementary, secondary and higher education;

q) Direction of the cultural, educational and scientific organisations and institutions of the Belorussian SSR, and administration of the cultural, educational and scientific organisations and institutions of all-Republican importance;

r) Direction of public health and administration of public health institutions of Republican importance;

s) Direction and organisation of physical culture and sports;

t) Organisation of the judicial organs of the Belorussian SSR;

u) Granting the rights of citizenship of the Belorussian SSR;

v) Amnesty and pardon of citizens convicted by judicial organs of

9: Amer. Russ. Inst. (no date) 1950 RC1 Belorussia RC1
[Constitution as of July, 1947]

642 the Belorussian SSR;
w) Establishment of the representation of the Belorussian SSR in international relations;
x) Organization of the military formations of the Belorussian SSR;
y) Legislation concerning marriage and the family.

Chapter III. The Higher Organs of State Power in the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic

646 Art. 20. The highest organ of state power in the Belorussian SSR is the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR.

Art. 21. The Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR is elected for a term of four years by the citizens of the Belorussian SSR voting by election districts on the basis of one deputy for every 30,000 of the population.

Art. 22. The Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR exercises all rights vested in the Belorussian SSR in accordance with Article 13 and 19 of the Constitution of the Belorussian SSR, insofar as they do not, by virtue of the Constitution, come within the jurisdiction of organs of the Belorussian SSR that are accountable to the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR, that is, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR, the Council of Ministers of the Belorussian SSR, and the Ministries of the Belorussian SSR.

Art. 23. The Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR is the sole legislative organ of the Belorussian SSR.

Art. 24. A law is considered adopted if passed by the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR by a simple majority vote.

Art. 25. Laws passed by the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR are published in the Belorussian and Russian languages over the signatures of the President and Secretary of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR.

Art. 26. The Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR elects a Chairman of the Supreme Soviet and four Vice-Chairmen.

Art. 27. The Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR presides at the sittings of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR and has charge of the conduct of its business and proceedings.

643 Art. 28. Sessions of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR are convened
640 by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR twice a year.

Extraordinary sessions are convened by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR at its discretion or on the demand of one-third of the deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR.

Art. 29. The Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR elects the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR, consisting of a President of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR, two Vice-Presidents, a Secretary of the Presidium and fifteen members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR.

Art. 30. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR is accountable to the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR for all its activities.

[Constitution as of July, 1947]

Chapter X. Arms, Flag, Capital

186 Art. 119. The arms of the Belorussian SSR are a sickle and hammer, against the rays of the rising sun, and surrounded by ears of rye, intertwined on the left with clover and on the right, with flax; below, between the two sheaves is a part of the globe. Both sheaves are intertwined with a red band inscribed with "Workers of All Countries, Unite!" in the Belorussian and Russian languages and, below, with the initials "BSSR". Above the arms is a five-pointed star.

Art. 120 . The state flag of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic is a red cloth, with a gold sickle and hammer and a red, gold-bordered, five-pointed star above, and the gold letters "BSSR" above it in the upper corner, near the staff.

Art. 121. The Capital of the Belorussian SSR is the City of Minsk.

Chapter XI. Procedure for Amending the Constitution

642 Art. 122. The Constitution of the Belorussian SSR may be amended only by decision of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR adopted by a majority not less than two-thirds of the votes of the Supreme Soviet.

Note: "Byelrousia" is now the correct spelling in English as accepted by the Committee for the Standardization of Geographical Names of the United Nations.

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000 This English translation was made from a Russian text published by the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1947.

2 [Errata: should read "below" --- Analyst]

21: Kolarz J-4 (no date) 1952 R1 Soviet Union R1
Belorussia AC1

III. BYELORUSSIA

The development of Soviet Byelorussia is essentially a copy of the history of the Soviet Ukraine. In many respects it is a very poor copy. Byelorussia is considerably smaller than the Ukraine, it has no outstanding economic wealth such as the Ukraine has and the national consciousness of the Byelorussian people has crystallized far less than that of the Ukrainians. The Byelorussians, it is true, can boast of an illustrious past and can claim for themselves the Lithuanian State of the Middle Ages, whose most important documents were couched in the Byelorussian language. However, the Byelorussians did not produce a Hetman Mazeppa, a vigorous rebel whose memory could inspire the present generation. The modesty of the Byelorussian national movement is almost touching. Nothing could characterize its spirit better than the title of the first Byelorussian publishing company founded in 1906 – 'In our windows also shall the sun shine'.

Byelorussian nationalism in Czarist times was so weak that no Byelorussian succeeded in getting elected to the Duma. The landowners voted for Polish candidates, and the peasants, in their ignorance, for extreme Russian nationalists. The October Revolution found the Byelorussians still too inarticulate as a nation to be able to cope with the great tests of the revolutionary years. Without much external pressure Byelorussia, or rather, what might have become Byelorussia, fell to pieces. The few Byelorussian intellectuals had no clearly defined political aim and turned from one extreme to another, wavering between a Polish, Lithuanian and Russian orientation and thus aggravating the chaos in which the Byelorussian people found themselves. By the end of 1920 the Byelorussians were under five different Byelorussian governments and National Committees, and in addition, had a Minister for Byelorussian Affairs in the Lithuanian Government.

At last the Peace of Riga concluded between Poland and Soviet Russia in 1921 determined the division of Byelorussia: Western Byelorussia with about 2,000,000 Byelorussians went to Poland, while Central and Eastern Byelorussia became part of the Soviet Union.*

SOVIET POLICY IN EASTERN BYELORUSSIA

At first the Soviet régime found it rather difficult to decide which territories to allocate to the Byelorussian S.S.R. When the B.S.S.R. was formally constituted on January 16th, 1921, the Russian communists

* The estimate of 2,000,000 is halfway between Polish and Russian statistics. According to the official Polish census there were but 1,123,000 Byelorussians in 'Western Byelorussia'. Molotov mentioned the figure of 3,000,000 when proclaiming the incorporation of Western Byelorussia into the U.S.S.R. on October 31st, 1939.

21: Kolarz J-4 (no date) 1952 R1 Soviet Union R1
BeloRussiaRC1

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had such a poor view of the strength of the Byelorussian national consciousness that they confined the Republic to a small border strip of 20,000 square miles and 1,500,000 inhabitants. Important Byelorussian districts with the towns of Vitebsk, Gomel and Mogilev remained within the R.S.F.S.R.

It took the Soviet central Government three years to transform the 'token republic' of Byelorussia into one which comprised the bulk of the Byelorussians living in a coherent territory in the western part of European Russia. On March 3rd, 1924, the Central Executive Committee of the U.S.S.R. issued a decree on the 'unification of all territories of the U.S.S.R. having a majority of Byelorussian population'. As a result of this decree the B.S.S.R. was able to enlarge its territory to 42,000 square miles and its population to 4,200,000.

Even after the 'unification decree' certain Byelorussian areas of the Soviet Union remained outside the B.S.S.R. and on December 6th, 1926, a new decree was published to rectify this situation by adding to Byelorussia some further territories including the town of Gomel. Through this second operation Byelorussia became a country of 48,000 square miles with nearly 5,000,000 inhabitants.

Be [101]

The 1926 census showed that great confusion persisted in Byelorussia as to who was a Byelorussian and who was not. Thus out of 4,017,000 ethnical Byelorussians only 3,350,000 declared their language to be Byelorussian. On the other hand the census recorded only 383,000 Great Russians in Byelorussia, although 1,165,000 people considered Great Russian as their language.

Be 565 464

The basic difficulty which the Soviet régime encountered among the Byelorussians was, however, not the language question, but the fact that the Byelorussian people had hardly any 'revolutionary vanguard' in the form of an industrial proletariat worth mentioning. The five predominantly Byelorussian Governments ('Gubernyas') of the Czarist Empire had in 1913 but 69,000 industrial workers of whom by no means all belonged to the Byelorussian people.

Be 162 369

Although Soviet statistics claimed that Byelorussian industry increased twenty-one-fold between 1913 and 1937, industrialization and urbanization made less progress in Byelorussia than in most other parts of European Russia. The major Byelorussian towns did not share in the general speedy growth of Soviet cities, nor did any new 'mushroom towns' emerge. Of the 174 towns of the Soviet Union which in 1939 had over 50,000 inhabitants only five were in Byelorussia and the largest Byelorussian town, Minsk, occupied the thirty-second place among the cities of the U.S.S.R. Byelorussia's towns were in the inter-war period only partially Byelorussian from the ethnical point of view, since they all had very large Jewish populations and included also a considerable number of Great Russians. In 1926 Minsk had 43·6 per cent Jewish